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LONDON, ONE NOVEMBER

HELEN MACKAY





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LONDON, ONE NOVEMBER

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

ACCIDENTALS

By HELEN MACKAY

AUTHOR OF "HOUSES OF GLASS" ETC.

Crown 8vo, cloth, gilt top, 5s. net

"A sketch-book of delicate pastels . . . by an artist, and that in every sense of the word. Just as the painter of genius can make a thing of beauty out of a sordid group of figures or a dingy interior, so can Mrs. Mackay with her pen conjure up an exquisite picture by merely, so it appears, recording what she sees."—*Times*.

"Infinitely sad . . . singularly beautiful. Now and then they have about them the grace of Maeterlinck's delicate reveries, the impress of a sensitive soul."—*Daily Telegraph*.

LONDON: ANDREW MELROSE LTD.

London, One November

BY

HELEN MACKAY

AUTHOR OF "ACCIDENTALS," "HOUSES OF GLASS"

NEW YORK

DUFFIELD & COMPANY

1916

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LONDON, ONE NOVEMBER

THIS

I THINK that all your years
led up to this,
and all your lives.

I think it was for this
that, worlds ago,
you came to greatness.

Your every man, of all your times,
was born and lived and died
to have his part in the great march of
things
that led to this.

It was for this you gathered lands
and kept the seas.

Fires on Druid altars burned for this,
and strange ships learned your harbours.

London, One November

For this you broke new roads
and kept old faiths.

I think your winds have always told of this.
I think for this that all your rains were tears,
and all your sunsets banners.

KEEPER

WHAT would the world be without you,
if you failed her ?

Girdled with your silver girdle
You have held your place so long.

Girdled with your silver girdle
You have stood aside, untroubled.

You have stood and watched and listened
and kept balance.

When they turned to you for judgment,
you have spoken.

Who would speak as you have spoken,
if in this you failed the world ?

Girdled with your silver girdle
you stood ready.

Always when your strength was needed,
you were strong.

Always when your word was spoken,
by your strength you have upheld it.

Who would answer the world's voices
if you failed her ?

BAGPIPES

FAR off in the fog, I heard the pipes,
calling and calling.
Through the fog, through the noise of the
streets,
they were calling and calling.

Ai mi, ai mi,
it's from the north they come ;
I know not their home,
their tongue is strange to me ;
I know not what they say,
but I would follow,
I would follow,
ai mi, ai mi,
I would follow,
wistfully.

Ai mi, ai mi,
it's to the dream they go,
the dream that is no dream,

Bagpipes

the way of no return ;
I have not seen the star,
but I would follow,
I would follow,
ai mi, ai mi,
I would follow,
faithfully.

The pipes came near, and near, in the fog,
calling and calling.
Through the life, through the life of the
town,
they were calling and calling.

Ai mi, ai mi,
it's from the north they go,
I know not the way,
the star is dark to me ;
I know not how to die,
but I would follow,
I would follow,
ai mi, ai mi,
I would follow,
endlessly.

A HOUSE

WHILE it was yet dark I went out into
London.

The street was one of big houses asleep.
The white arc moons showed the houses
asleep,
and made them seem strange,
as if they could not be houses that people
lived in.

The street was wet, and the half-moons
were reflected in it,
as if in purple water.

Nothing passed through the street.

It was as if nothing ever had passed through
the street,

or ever would pass through it.

Tiptoeing, holding my breath, how I felt
London,—

London, London, London,—

in the street, there, when it was silent.

A House

There was a square full of trees.
When I got to the square I found the
morning.

The morning was in the sky,
though there was no light of it yet.
I stood waiting.

There was a waking and stirring and moving
apart
of wet purple clouds.

Between the clouds that were drawn aside,
day was coming to London.

The pale half-moons paled in the day.
The city came to be glamoured.

It was like folk-stories of people
“glamoured”

by some beautiful thing
coming upon them out of fairy land.

From what land was it that the day came?

I wanted to go on and walk through the
glamoured streets.

But I had to stay in the square because of
a house in it.

London, One November

I found that I had been standing before
that house,
all the time, while I waited for day.

The sky came to be of rose and gold behind
that house,
and the roofs and chimneys of the house
were purple
against the rose and gold.

The rose and gold showed through the
roofs and chimneys
as if they were translucent, made of
amethyst.

Lights came to the windows of the lower
storey of the house,
and the windows were thrown open wide
into rooms that were being made ready for
a new day.

They were great rooms, full of shining things.

I do not know the people of the house,
I only knew of them, and of their son.
His name had been told to London yesterday.
One name among the names of the dead
where there is war.

A House

House, great house, how can you stay quiet
like that,

when your only son is killed ?

Why do you not cry out, cry out to
London ?

Why do you not cry out your grief
to all the streets of London,
and your pride to the sunrise ?

House, great house,
how can it be that they set your rooms in
order for a day
when he is dead ?

How can it be that of such mourning you
give no sight or sound ?

Why do you not cry out to London

“Take my sorrow and make a throne
of it” ?

There passed a coster cart,
little pattering donkey with a feather behind
one ear,

wheels rattling, cockney boy singing.

Then there passed a milk cart
with beautiful big shining golden milk jars.

London, One November

London, waking, will ask of the day,
“Day, what news do you bring of the
battle?”

House, can you bear it and not cry out to
the day,
“His name is told; what is your news to
me?”

TORCH BEARERS

You have kindled your torch
from the sacred fire.

The flame of your torch is divine.

In your two hands you hold the torch high,
to bear it far.

Through night,
dreadful night, dreadful night of the world,
you will bear your torch,
steadily and high,
that its light may have part
in the shining of the great light,
the glory,
until morning.

OBLATION

LONDON, of lives upon lives,
is it all one ?
Is it all one offering ?
All those lives in the chalice
you lift up ?
All those lives,
on one altar
are they laid ?
All those lives,
as the incense of one prayer
are they gone ?
All the lives,
are they one great sacrifice ?
One great offering
to—
what god can there be great enough ?
London—
what god can there be
great enough ?

THE LONG DEAD

UNDER their stones they lie, in great
cathedrals,

dust and ashes.

But they are not there.

Under grass they lie, in little churchyards,
dust and ashes.

But they are not there.

Far in strange lands they lie, with no sign
over them,

dust and ashes.

But they are not there.

Under deep seas they lie, lost in sea changes,
pearl and coral.

But they are not there.

From all their places,
their worshipped and their unknown places,
they are gone to where the new comers
give golden shining
above the dark battle.

LISTENING

I WOULD understand what London is saying.
London is not saying it for me,
but I listen.

I listen in the night-times, apart, in a
hushed room.

“ Hundreds of years ; year upon year, year
after year.

Hundreds and hundreds of lives.

Stones and stones and stones.

And iron and rust,

and mildew and mould and ashes and dust.

Lives piled upon lives,

Numberless, nameless lives,

heaped up in the dust and the mould
of the hundreds of years.”

Going up and down through the streets

I listen in the daytimes.

I stop to listen at the street corners.

Listening

“ Out of the years, into the years ;
begun and ended ; ending, beginning ;
the first and the last ; the last and the first.
Over and over and over again.”

The words come broken off, out of rhythm.

One night I was going into the park,
by the little gate at the top of the street.
I had to stand waiting a long time at the
gate,
because of many, many men who were going
through it.

It was not night, only as dark as midnight
in the November afternoon.
The sound of marching feet came from far
away,
in the street's strange lights and shadows.
Dark figures and dark figures and dark
figures
came from deep away among the lights and
shadows,
marching to the music of their feet.

They came and came and came,
from far and far along the street.

London, One November

And the street seemed to sing
with the rhythm of their marching.

I stood back and listened.

Their lines swung apart at the gate,
two forward and through, and then two
more,

for it is a little gate.

And on the other side of the gate they
went on,

far, far,

across the wide spaces of the park.

Across the wide spaces, over the misty
lawns,

the dark figures passed, swinging in rhythm,
where their feet made no sound on the
grass.

I listened for a long time,

there by the little gate, after they were
gone.

PARK

BEYOND the dim, wide, mysterious spaces of
the park,
the great sombre trees and the gleaming water
and the few, pale-gold lamps,—
that were not round moons any more, but
delicate half-moons,—

beyond the haunting of it,
there were roofs and chimneys,
dark in the darkening sky.

And there was a dimmed, darkened abiding
of lights in windows,
and a dimmed, darkened travel of lights in
the streets,
up and down.

There were great wide marvellous streamers
of white light,
shafts of white light,
that swept the city over and over.

Because, beyond all these things, there was
war.

STREETS

IN the streets there were wonderful lights
and shadows.

The streets were wonderful
where the lights and shadows travelled,
and wonderful where they stayed still.

The white lamps of the streets, hanging
high over the streets,
were clouded moons.

Under them in the great streets,
the red-gold and yellow-gold and green-
gold lights
of many journeys, went beautiful mysterious
ways.

In the streets of less travel
the light of the white half-moons,
that were few and wide apart,
stayed very, very still,
on its spaces of wall and pavement,
and was a strangely silent light.

Streets

In those streets the shadows stayed still,
very still, in unfathomable depths,
that were wells of silence.

Where small streets led to great streets,
there was a beautiful lighting
of altar candles at the end.

In the squares the trees and the half-moons
dreamed together,
and all the statues were beautiful.

In the places of the poor,
alleys and courtyards and the gas-lit barrow
markets
were so beautiful,
with the mystery of lights and shadows,
that sometimes one thought one was happy
just because of them.

But when one was come to the river,
with its wharves and palaces and masts and
towers,
and great cranes and chimneys ;
its looming things and lurking things,
its swaying, swinging things,

London, One November

its high lifted things and deep flung things—
one knew that all of it was terrible.

And that to London, London, London,
none of it made any difference.

“ALL OUT !”

KENSINGTON GARDENS

IN the wet, soft, thick autumn twilight at
closing time,
the old, slow keepers of the gardens were
calling,
up and down the paths,
“All out ! All out !”

The keepers of the gardens all had old
hoarse voices.
“All out ! All out !” they had been calling
at twilight,
through years upon years.

“All out ! All out !”
The keepers of the gardens were calling,
up and down the paths,
between the great, bare, dark trees, among
the dead leaves,

London, One November

through the mists, along the glimmering
and enchanted water,
over the dusky rims of the hills,
“All out ! All out !”

There was something very strange about it.
One did not know why it was strange.
What was there so mysterious about it, and
so beautiful ?

It was as if the voices came from deep away
in a dim, unending country.

“All out ! All out !” they were calling,
over the rims of the hills.

Over the rims of the dusky hills
there were hanging wonderful pale-gold
half-moons,
the lamps of a far away country.

It was not the country of faery
that the lamps were lighting.

It was a country deeper than that.

The land of faery would be a lovely, wistful
country.

But the country of the lamps
was a world without end.

“All Out !”

Into the country of the lamps, one could go
on and on,
deeper and deeper, for ever and ever.

People who fell asleep in faery land,
waked to remember their own land no more.
But it was not that people going away
into the country of the lamps would forget.

The keepers of the gardens were calling,
“All out ! All out !”
up and down the gardens in the twilight.

Footsteps went away out of the gardens in
the twilight.

It was strange to hear them going.
They might be going anywhere—anywhere.
They went away into countries of lamps.
And there was no knowing what became of
them.

I will tell you something strange.
It is that beyond all this, there is war.

YEARS OF LONDON

WITH shifting and swinging of places
and tumult of dreams,
London,
years have served thee,
and are gone.

From darkness of infinite spaces
and burning of suns,
years have come to serve thee,
and passed on.

To darkness of uttermost spaces
and burning of suns,
they are gone,
the years that served thee,
told and done.

With shifting and moving of spaces
and tumult of dreams,
from darkness of desolate places

Years of London

and glimmer of streams,
to glimmer of seas the streams swing to,
and silence of stars the streets sing to,
all the hosts of years that served thee,
London,
they are gone.

From the dusk of the world they were come,
to the dusk of the world they are gone ;
from the silence of stars in their places,
through your tumult of dreams,
to the darkness of infinite spaces
and passing of streams.

GREATEST CITY

HAD I gifts of song and dancing,
they would be for you, London.
Could I laugh,
I would give you my laughter.
But I will not give you my tears.

Came I with gifts
of red wine and golden wine
and fine white bread
and honey in the amber comb
and purple grapes and figs
and scarlet pomegranates,
proud,
I would kneel
at the feet of your greatness.
But I will not beg a crust of you.

At your cross-roads
I would pitch my tent,
were it of cloth of gold,
barred with cedar.

Greatest City

Had I ivory and sandal-wood
and mother of pearl,
magic carpets,
and covers of swans' down,
fragrant of spices,
proud,
I would fix at your cross-roads
my dwelling.

But, in need of shelter,
to the wilderness I turn
away from you.

Sailed I in ships of silken sail,
from the four ways of the wind
I would come to you.
Journeyed I with caravans of treasure,
all roads for me
would lead to you, London.

My hands empty,
my feet bruised with stones,
I will go out from you,
that my best gift,
the gift of my grief and my need,
be not given to you.

ROADS CALLING

IN Midsummer,
from very far away,
I saw my France ;
her lovely roads
all bruised and stained,
her golden fields
left desolate ;
the men gone forth,
the women weeping,
—now the men were gone,
and they might weep,—
the little children wondering.

From very far away
I heard the dear roads calling.
The roads called to my feet
most desolately :
“ Where are you ?
In our great need of all who loved us,
where are you ?

Roads Calling

Do you not know this thing
that has befallen ? ”

I heard them say :

“ We are burned and moulten,
as hard as bronze.

Hurt are the feet that march to save us,
and the feet that stay faithful beside us.”

I knew the weariness,
the daze and failing,
of all things on the roads,
beneath the heat.

I knew the dust that blinded.

I saw the roads,
from far away,
and heard them calling,

“ There are tears and tears and tears,
in our dust.”

Then, at the end of Summer,
I heard my dear roads calling :

“ There is blood in our dust.

The blood of feet that loved us
is in our dust.”

London, One November

I saw my roads,
deep scarred with dreadful passing,
all rent and torn,
between strange harvest fields ;
shattered and broken,
between fields of dreadful harvest.

I heard my dear roads calling :
“ You used to love the rain upon us.
The rain falls into wounds now.
You used to love the mists upon us.
Do you know what the mists cover now ? ”

Through all the Autumn
I heard my dear roads calling,
calling my feet, that loved them,
from very far away :
“ The darkness gathers early
about pain and desolation.
You loved us where the village lights were
kindly,
golden and warm upon us,
beneath little windows.
There are no more kind lights.

Roads Calling

But lights of desperate fires,
burning, burning.
And lights that tear the world,
and tear the sky.
And are all lights of death.
You loved us when the moon was white
 upon us ;
we gave healing to the pain
that drove you out to us from houses.
The moonlight is more terrible
than darkness, now."

Through nights and days
I heard my dear roads calling,
calling my feet,
that would have died for them.
From far away
I heard my dear roads saying :
"There come feet,
through all this horror,
to bear help and healing for us,
faithful to us,
through all this agony
of blood and tears."

London, One November

Tears and blood, blood and tears.
I heard my dear roads calling :
“ Where are you ?
You used to love us.
There are feet that stay with us,
in the midnight,
in the noonday.”

Now, at the end of Autumn,
I hear my dear roads calling,
of little things I die for,
through things too great for me.
To my chained feet
the roads I know are calling,
calling in pride of grief,
exultantly.

“ Always you loved the hoar-frost,
white upon the tall dry grasses
at our edges.
You loved the tracks of wild things,
across us and along us,
in the mornings, early.

Roads Calling

Tears are frozen.

Winds cut into the wounds.

Do you know what there is in our fields
now ?

The feet that are faithful to us suffer,
suffer for us, terribly,
terribly.

Do you not envy them ?

Do you not perish with envy of them ? ”

STRANGER IN THE LONDON OF WAR

THE streets of London said to my feet,
“ What are you doing here ?
You do not know us well enough to love us.
Why are you not upon the roads of the
country
that you love ? ”

London said to me, “ Why are you here ? ”
I wanted to tell London why I stay.
But London is so great.
Poor little reason that kills me,
what is it to tell ?
London asks, and does not wait for an
answer.

My feet stand aside, afraid,
in the London streets.

Up and down,
through the sounds of the streets of London,

Stranger in the London of War

through all the sounds of
London, London, London,
there goes the sound of marching feet.
Up and down the streets of London
they go marching.
Through all the sounds of London
I hear them as they go.

Perhaps they go away to places
terrible and strange and glorious with war,
places far off and unreal,
of glory and horror and wonder.
Perhaps they are yet only marching
to some lesson of war,
that they must learn,
in park and square.

For them there is no music
of drum and fife and trumpet.

For drum and fife and trumpet
they must go silently.

But there is a deeper music,
a trailing, lingering music,

London, One November

that follows after them
and yet stays on when they are gone.

Ground, ground !
Under the rumour and murmur of London,
how far do you carry away
the sound of the marching feet ?

Resonant, echoing ground
full of the rhythm and music
of those feet, marching ;
—far off, are there people who hear it ?

Ground, ground,
long after music of drum and fife and
trumpet
would be spent and vanished and gone,
you are keeping and carrying on
the music of those feet, marching.

Far off, are there people who hear it,
who stop, and stand listening to love it,
whose hearts beat in its rhythm,
till they break for grief and for pride ?

WIND AND SHADOWS

IN the night the wind was abroad upon
London.

Did it come from the north ?

It was like wolves.

From the east, or the west ?

It was like seas.

From the south ?

It was like deserts.

It was mad, mad, in the streets of London.

The wind was gone mad, in the streets of
London.

In the streets about Parliament
we were alone with it.

There was a great street, bared and empty.

I do not know what was the name of that street.

On either side of it were great, very dark
houses,

that stood up strong and quiet.

They meant the strength and quietude of
England.

London, One November

It was strange to hear the wind gone mad
in so certain and secure a street.

The street was very dark.
All the lights of London
were like the music of muffled drums.

I thought the lights of that street
made music with the wind,
a sound of muffled drums behind the wind.

We walked fast, and did not talk at all.
There was something one could not bear.
What was it that one could not bear ?

We walked fast, fast, in that street.
The wind was driving great clouds
over London through the night.
There was no rain falling.
The pools of wet along the street shivered,
under the wind,
in the light of the shadowed lamps.
Strange shadows came and went,
with the wind.

They were like shadows of great wings.
Of what great wings were they the shadows ?

SHADOW FLAG

At sunset I came into the park
by the little gate at the top of the street.
The sky, across the wide fields and beyond
the trees,
was crimson as the most gorgeous music of
battle.
The world under it was blue like quiet
water.

There was a field that was a blue cloud of
people,
under the crimson sky.

A man was standing up above the people,
in some high thing, perhaps a cart.
I could not hear what he was saying to the
people.
He stood against the crimson sky,
a blue rocking shadow.

London, One November

The little railings of the paths, leading away
from the gate,
were all quite black.

All the little black lines of the railings
were ways over to the blue crowd,
and the shadow man in the cart.

It was like something in a dream.
I was afraid, with the different fear,
that other fear, special to dreams.
I wanted to cry out to all the people,
"It is not true. It cannot be true.
It is too terrible.

We are dreaming, all of us.
One morning we shall wake,
and know we dreamed it,
and wonder how we ever dreamed
a thing so terrible."

Suddenly the shadow man flung out a flag,
before all the people, against the sunset.
The flag was blue against the sunset,
a flag made of shadow.

RAGGED KING SONG

THERE was a king of London,
do re mi fa—
a tattered king who had no crown,
do re mi fa—
and went the highways up and down,
and all the byways up and down,
to hear the song of London,
to learn the song of London,
do re mi fa—

London, London, what is the song you
sing ?

Stranger, come from I don't know where,
that is my song for the king,
do re mi fa—

London, London, is it rags your king
should wear ?

Stranger, begone with you,
what do you think I care ?
Do re mi fa—

London, One November

London, London, the king is starved and
cold !

Stranger, he's one of ten thousand kings !

I give him a harp of ten thousand strings,

I give him that throb of the song he sings,

the lilt and the throb of the song he sings,

I give him the beat of my heart that sings,

—What more can he need of gold ?

Do re mi fa—

TAKE

If you would say to me, London, London,
if you would say to me, only once, halt-
ingly,

“Come thou deep into me,
stranger and sojourner,
come thou deep into me,
seeking for treasure,”—

If you would say to me, London, London,
if you would say to me, only once,
tenderly,

just one word, meant for me,
stranger and sojourner,—
how I could worship you,
utter and infinite.

Utter and infinite, city of endlessness,
vast as all oceans, and as unfathomable,—
what have you not for them,
those who may enter you ?

London, One November

Those who are born of you, London,
London,
what do you say to them,
out of your endlessness ?
What do you say, in your streets,
by your river ?

Sinister, radiant ;
wretched and desperate and royal ;
stately and horrible ;
cringing and towering ;
soaring and sinking,—
down, down, down, utterly ;
menacing always,
always insistent ;
—is that what you are to them,
calling them into you,
saying “my own ” to them ?

Or do you pass them by,
not at all caring ?

In their great houses, where it is beautiful,
and they are desolate,
do you not care for them ?

Take

In gutters and doorways,
on the wet benches,
under the bridges,
do you not know of them ?

Asleep in stone doorways,
on ivory couches ;
clothed in rags or white samite,
do you see, as you pass them ?

Where they are starving,
for bread or for tenderness,
do you not say to them,
“ Here is my heart for thee,
my heart for thee broken.
Take thou and eat of it ” ?

THINGS

For the mystery of crowds and loneliness ;
for the terrible mystery of contrast ;
for the mystery of things the twilights fold
 away,
and of things the mornings promise.

For the mystery of the nearness of stars to
 chimneys,
and the belonging of roofs in the sky.

For the mystery of rain and fog,
of hideous things that seem beautiful,
and beautiful things that may be dreams ;
and dense, soft, orange-gold sunshine ;
and of smoke, always smoke, with ten
 thousand colours.

For the mystery of doors one may not enter,
of footsteps one may not stop.

Things

For the mystery of black things against
golden things,
the mystery of contrast.

For the terrible mystery of contrast,
and the mystery of crowds and loneliness,
and the mystery of your great indifference,
—oh, for the mystery of your great
indifference !—

London, I fear you.

MORE THINGS

WINDOWS and doorways and stairs,
and all their mystery,
—what is their mystery,
London, London ?

Chimneys and gables and tiles,
and all their mystery,
—what is their mystery,
London, London ?
Is it their countlessness,
London, London ?
London, London,
world without end.

I have wandered your great streets,
London, London,
and seen your great doorways.
Is it the mystery of great closed doorways ?
—God, and their loneliness !

More Things

I have wandered your small streets,
London, London,
and known fine, forlorn doorways.
Is it the mystery of things forgotten,
with their old echoes and old shadows ?

I have known in your dreadful streets,
London, London,
doorways that are standing always open,
always wide open, hopeless and waiting.
Unknown, who has come, and who gone ?
And to what ?
Were not that enough mystery,
London, London ?

Windows and doorways and stairs,
and all their mystery.

Stairs that go up a little way,
in little houses,
who knows how far and high,
to sight of all kingdoms ?

Stairs of horn and of ivory,
dusty and cobwebbed ;

London, One November

stairs lighted with golden lamps,
where velvets trail over,
and there are lilies.

Stairs where the dark is dreadful,
and the light more dreadful,
stairs of hurt footsteps,
stairs of dark towers.

What is their mystery,
London, London ?

Windows and roofs and chimneys,—
and I have known the stars between the
chimneys.

I have met stars among the chimneys,
close down to the black roofs.

And I have seen the stars of windows
that watched and waited,
keeping vigil all night through,
with,—who knows what,
of grief and fear and pain and loneliness ?

I have seen white moonlight,
marching silently over you,
London, London, world without end.

More Things

I have seen those lights, whiter than moon-
light,
in great shafts and columns, sweeping you
over,
London, over and over.

And I have watched day come,
gathering up all lights into its light,
silently.

Chimneys and windows and roofs,
and all their mystery,
—and all their mystery,
London, London.

I know how morning comes to them ;
from my high window
I know how morning comes to them,
city of endlessness,
with war and waiting.

I have watched the darkness move upon
them,—
housetops and housetops and housetops,
world without end,—
as upon the face of lonely waters ;

London, One November

I have watched the light
of here and there a window,
that has kept vigil,
—dimmed, darkened war windows,
tragic windows, surely,
to have so watched the nights out,—
grow more strange and more lonely,
down the far reaches,
as the light of morning
gathered up all lights
into its greatness.

London, London,
what is the mystery of small things,
intimate and most strange,—
windows that watch nights through,
and each alone ?

SONG IN THAT NOVEMBER

WHEN the spring comes to you,
London, London,
and the daffodils shine in your ways,
and your thrushes sing,
and your walled winds swing,
down the gold of your glancing days,—
how then will you bear with her,
London, London?
how will you bear with her light on your
tears?

When the spring comes to you,
London, London,
with the gift of all life in her hands,
with her laughs and her lights,
and her throbbing gold nights,
and the hour-glass singing the sands,—
how then will you bear with her,
London, London?

London, One November

*how will you bear with her light on your
tears ?*

*Out of the depths of your war and your
mourning,*

how can you pardon her promise of years ?

BEGGAR

THE streets of London said to my feet,
“What are you doing here ?
What are you doing here
in the time of our pride and sorrow ?
What is our pride and sorrow to you ? ”
I went in the rain to those streets
of the palaces of the ruling of empire.
Those streets that are big with fate,
and that have been big with fate since so
 very long ;
those streets where makers of kings and
 builders of empire
have gone up and down,
wherein wars have been begun and been
 ended,
and where power has long dwelt and
 remained.

A terrible, beautiful thing was going out
from those streets to distant countries.

London, One November

Through all the days, through all the
nights,
a terrible, beautiful thing was going out
from those streets,
to places so far from the streets
that it seemed the streets could not imagine.

Streets, what is it that you say
to the feet going away from you to save
you ?
What is there glorious enough for you to
say to them ?

Kings, many kings,
came to those streets,
I knew it in the rain.
All the kings wore purple and ermine,
as they went up and down in those streets ;
they all had crowns and sceptres.
The crowns and sceptres meant a beautiful,
chosen thing,
long retained, and high.

Great statesmen, in splendid robes,
came to those streets.
I knew it in the rain.

Beggar

They came down out of their places
in the long length of the Past,
and went about those streets,
up and down,
through the days and the nights.

Great warriors, clad in armour,
came to those streets.

I knew them in the rain.

They came from where they lay,—
and who knew where they lay?—
under strange earths and suns,
and the ebb and flow of tides.

They came from where they lay,
and went about those streets, up and down,
with sword and shield,
in their shining armour.

There was a little old stooping ragged man
standing at a street corner,
where it was almost dark between two
palaces.

He stood for a long time there at the street
corner.

London, One November

He seemed to be watching things and
listening to things.

They were his kings, his kings,
in purple and ermine ;
and his statesmen in robes of state ;
and his warriors,
arrayed in splendour and pride of battle ;
his, his own,
who were passing to and fro,
up and down the streets,
his streets,
there in the rain.

RIVER OF LONDON

ALWAYS the streets said to my feet,
“What are you doing here ?
What right have you here ?”

But that was not what the river said to my
feet.

The river says just one thing
to all the feet of the world.

Great river, old river, dark river,
ceaseless and changeless and silent,
I am glad of what you say.
How many, many, many people have heard
that which you say,
and understood and been glad of it,
strange river,
where hideous things all are beautiful.
All those people are my friends because of
you.

London, One November

And when I stand beside you, I am no more
alone.

When I stand beside the river,
close down beside the river,
those people of the river come to me.
Some of them come up out of the river in
grey dresses,
with small pale stars in their foreheads.
And some of them come down to the river
dressed in shadow,
out of the city's shadows.
So when I stand beside the river I am no
more lonely.

COWARDS

RIVER of London, London, London,
I come to you because I am afraid of the
 streets,
and of you I am not afraid.

All the rivers of cities say the same thing,
the one thing,
to their cities, throughout the world.

All the rivers of cities,
blue rivers and grey and brown and golden
 rivers,
rivers of all the four ways of the wind,
passing through cities,
in sunshine and snow and mist and rain,
coming from mountains and going to seas,
say that thing, that one thing, to their
 cities.

London, One November

All the people understand it,
whose feet know the roads of rivers.

River, river, river of London,
what the streets say is strange to me,
but what you say I understand.

BRIDGE

BETWEEN two great soft golden blurs of
light,

there was a bridge.

Dark things loomed out of the golden
blurs :

tall things,

with windows dimmed because there was
war ;

and towers that were towers of dreams
in the mists and the night ;

and chimneys as beautiful as the most
beautiful towers ;

and black shapes and masses,

some of them with red gold furnace fires,
and watch fires,

glowing in their hearts ;

and great cranes, tilted like the masts of
ships.

London, One November

Over the wide dim glimmering road of the
river,
the bridge hung on its steel girders.

It hung on nervous great steele girders,
and was quick with a life of its own.
It answered to the touch of things upon it,
and quivered and throbbed with their
passing.

My feet felt the bridge tremble,
and knew it was alive.

There was a city all along the river,
up and down,
that I had been watching in the river,
as in a glass, darkly.
I had watched from sunset until,
fold on fold,
the city was gathered away,
towers and chimneys
and huge dark shapes of things,
in the mists and the night.
But the lights of the city stayed on
in the river.

Bridge

The red and gold of furnace fires
and watch fires
shone in the sands,
the wet glowing sands of the margin,
and made great blurs and blotches of light
in the dark water.

And the shadowed war lights,
of street lamps and windows and the lamps
of the bridge,
were paths upon the water, quivering and
long.

Black boats and barges, with lamps like
stars,
passed under the bridge.

They came from out of the world,
and went on out of the world,
from mists and night, into mists and night.

Black wet shining traffic
came and went over the bridge,
out from the strange war lights and
shadows,
into the strange war lights and shadows,
heavily.

London, One November

People and people and people
passed me, coming and going across the
 bridge ;
with their countless footsteps,
each one his different footstep.
And the bridge was alive, and knew.

TWO RIVERS

RIVER of London,
and when I come to you in early mornings,
the voices of my river call to me.

*I think of the bridge that I know,
the old stone bridge of five arches,
over my river,
my river,
that comes through the mists of the morning,
the azure and rose and opal and gold
of the mists of the morning.*

I think of it, here by your darkness,
your proud splendid terrible darkness,
River of London.

You are so wide and so secret,
what have you not in your depths,
River of London ?

When there is sunshine upon you,
what have you not yet deep in you of
darkness ?

London, One November

The seabirds that come to you,
those thousands of seabirds,
why am I afraid of them,
River of London ?

The streets of London are full of war,
and you, River of London, you do not care.
The streets cry out of war,
and you pass on, silently.

*My river comes
past the church of the two great towers
and the slim spire,
past the quai of the old clock
and the flowers ;
under white bridges,
between quais of many trees,
past the dome where live irised pigeons,
past the palace that belongs no more to kings.*

*My river too has borne strange cargoes,
ages and ages of cargoes.*

*The water of my river is a water of tears ;
the water of my river is bitter and sweet with
tears,
and it is a singing water.*

Two Rivers

*There is a clear shining always about my river,
between the many rains,
through all the darknesses of dark November.*

*My river is the river of a country of war.
It is the river of a stricken country.*

They cry out war in London streets,
but the streets of my city,
where I am not,
are silent.

*There, by my river, I could know the greatness
of every drop of blood, and every tear fallen,
of every smile through tears,
and the need of one hand for the touch of another.*

River of London,
you are greater than man's passing.

River of London,
and when I stand by you I know that wars
are idle,

I know the uselessness of everything,
and that there is no thing worth weeping
for.

That is your greatness.

END

RIVER of London ;
and when I came to you—there was the
moon for me.

And I had thought you were the end of
everything.

You come from the end of the world,
you go to the end of the world,
fateful and silent, inevitable ;
and I had thought you were the end
of it.

But there is no end.
You are the beginning.

River of London ;
and when I came to you, there, with the
moon all white,
—and I had never known how strange she
was,—
I understood, quite suddenly.

End

River of London ;
and when I came to you, and saw the moon
 all cold
upon your towers and cranes and domes and
 scaffoldings,
I knew you never ended hours and days,
only began them ;
and meant, not really death,
but only life and labour,
the building and rebuilding of men's years.

TRAIN

WILL the train never start ?
God, make the train start.

She cannot bear it, keeping up so long ;
and he, he no more tries to laugh at her.
He is going.

She holds his two hands now.
Now, she has touch of him and sight of
him.

And then he will be gone.
He will be gone.

They are so young.
She stands under the window of his carriage,
and he stands in the window.
They hold each other's hands
across the window ledge.
And look and look,
and know that they may never look again.

Train

The great clock of the station,—
how strange it is.

Terrible that the minutes go,
terrible that the minutes never go.

They had walked the platform for so long,
up and down, and up and down—
the platform, in the rainy morning,
up and down, and up and down.

The guard came by, calling,
“Take your places, take your places.”

She stands under the window of his carriage,
and he stands in the window.

God, make the train start !
Before they cannot bear it,
make the train start !

God, make the train start !

The three children, there,
in black, with the old nurse,
standing together, and looking, and looking,
up at their father in the carriage window,
they are so forlorn and silent.

London, One November

The little girl will not cry,
but her chin trembles.

She throws back her head,
with its stiff little braid,
and will not cry.

Her father leans down,
out over the ledge of the window,
and kisses her, and kisses her.

She must be like her mother,
and it must be the mother who is dead.

The nurse lifts up the smallest boy,
and his father kisses him,
leaning through the carriage window.

The big boy stands very straight,
and looks at his father,
and looks, and never takes his eyes from
him.

And knows that he may never look again.

Will the train never start ?
God, make the train start !

Train

The father reaches his hand down from the
window,
and grips the boy's hand,
and does not speak at all.

Will the train never start ?

He lets the boy's hand go.

Will the train never start ?

He takes the boy's chin in his hand,
leaning out through the window,
and lifts the face that is so young, to his.
They look and look,
and know that they may never look again.

Will the train never start ?

God, make the train start !

FOR FRANCE

JOURNEY IN THE DARK

THEY come to France in the darkness
from the dark water.

The lights of France
shine from her dark shores
into the night, quietly,
as if there were no war.

But when they are come near,
—there are the signs of it.

There are the signs of war along the quays,
there are the signs of war against the
houses.

Old grey town of the masts of ships,
steep roofed town of bells and ships and sea-
birds,
what is this on your quay in the lamp-light ?
What is this in your windows ?

Journey in the Dark

Town of the wounded and dying and dead,
you are become a tragic door
for entering in.

They come into France by a tragic door.
And then they cannot see the roads and fields.
Night covers them, and autumn rain.

I know of poplars beaten in the wind,
and shivering pools with willows at their
edges,
and broken forests, and heights and hollows
trampled.

Sometimes there are the lights of lonely
houses,
a window, down a lost distance,
part of the darkness and the loneliness.

And, wide apart, there are the lights of
towns,
long halts at stations
where there are things, lamp lit,
that make one know what is befallen.

The troop trains going through,
the trains of wounded,

London, One November

the groups of huddled people,
the Red Cross at the stations.

The lantern and the Red Cross.
Sometimes where there are odours of sweet
fields
in the rain.

And sometimes where a town
is strangely silent,
and unlighted.

Always in the dark the war is with them.
Not the fine frenzy,
not the song, not the trumpet and glory,
but the broken abandoned thing,
silent, in darkness.

Not the moment of lifted glory,
not the swing of rapture and madness,
but the thing that the madness has broken,
and left after it, long lasting,
when rapture is gone ;
the thing used, flung aside,
and left there, behind, in the darkness.

And, at the end of hours,
there is the city of laughter.

JOYOUS CITY

THE burden of the city of laughter.
Behold the city is brought to silence.

Because it is a day of trouble and treading
down ;

because barriers are broken

and lands are laid waste,

and the sons of the land go forth to battle,

and the streets are strewn with ashes,

and in sackcloth the dancers are dressed ;

because it is night at noonday

with war and desolation,

and the sun is darkened in his going
forth ;

because towers are laid low, and strong
towers fallen,

and gladness is taken away, and joy,

out of the plentiful fields ;

because all the graven images of her gods

London, One November

are broken unto the ground,
the city is brought to silence.

What is this that there is in the streets
of the city of laughter ?

It is a thing more beautiful than laughter.

SONG FOR PARIS

My lady, did I love you when you
laughed ?

My lady, when the stars shone in your
hair,

when your dancing feet wore sandals all of
wings,

did I love you, when you laughed and did
not care,

when carelessly you flung us precious
things ?

City, loved of all the nations,

did I love you when they sought you
for your laughter ?

My lady, now you dress in cloth of
grief.

My lady, now your eyes are hurt with
tears.

Now your feet that danced tread sword
blades all the way,

London, One November

and your laughter is forgotten down lost
years.

Now your gift is every dreadful day.

City, waiting in deep stillness,
give to us, who laughed once, sharing
of your sorrow.

THINGS IN PARIS

THE smell of roasted chestnuts at street
corners,
the glow of the red coals in the brazier ;
the big yellow pumpkins at the creamery
door ;
the books on the wall of the river,
and their odour, old and brown ;
the winter flowers in the streets,
the south come there from far gardens,
carts full of violets and mimosa,
and pale roses with leaves like coral ;
the cobbler's lamp in the courtyard,
the window of fried potatoes,
the sparrows,
the old cabs in the wet,
the tilt of umbrellas,—

These things will be in their accustomed
places,
their small, absurd, accustomed places.

London, One November

I see the children in their black school
aprons,
and the old crones in their white caps.

The children romp at recess in frozen
gardens.

The old crones go into the churches,
where it is warm, and there are candles.

ETOILE - BASTILLE

DOWN in the black tunnel full of lamps,
of red and golden lamps,
and full of shut-in sounds,
rumble and roar,
and echoing steps,
all tired steps,
I know a lovely thing.

Tired people, hurrying,
Wearing out endless days
of strain and dread,
Wearing out anguish and the hours,
desperately, silently,
My people, grown so silent,—

I know the touch that you would give me
on your grief.

I am desperate for a sharing of your weariness
and for the touch that you would give me
on your grief.

QUINZE VINGT

THEIR last sight was the red sight of
battle,
and they will see no other thing,
down all their lives.
They sit in darkness,
and are very silent.
They are all young,
and all their lives they must sit still,
in darkness.

At the door of their house is hopelessness.
Hopelessness waits at the door of their
house.

Hopelessness is thick and dense.
It has no wet of tears.
One could take hopelessness in one's
hands,
and make a bandage of it
to bind about one's eyes.

Quinze Vingt

It would be dry and stiff,
and hurt one's eyes.

They are all young and strong.
They will have long to live,
and to be blind.

CANTINE MATERNELLE

THEIR children will be France
when this is done;
their children will be France
when, after this,
she stands up proud and strong
to face new days
and sow her fields again,
with head held high
and quickened step,
and freer swing of scattering golden grain
across the sunrise.

Their children will be France
when France lifts up
the golden lighted thing
that is her soul,
when the clear flame shines out,
above old wrongs,
old wrongs and darknesses,

Cantine Maternelle

and all her own
is born to her
of deeper things, of singing, glowing
things,
with the new morning.

COURTESAN

THIS thing is theirs.
Those other women,
they have it for their own.
Theirs is the right to pride,
the right to grief.

Those other women, women of men's
houses,
where children may be—
I have made mock of them.

And now this thing is theirs.

Theirs is the road and theirs the field,
as always was the house.

For them the men go out upon the road.
And to each one of them
if her man fall,
belongs the field wherein he lies.

Courtesan

The burden of the war is theirs to bear,
and bearing it they have a right to sing
of love and death and glory,
honour and faith and sacrifice,
exultantly.

Is the house fallen ?
Theirs was the right to fall with it.

The men go out to battle.

Those other women have the right
to laugh them off
and weep for them after.

And I, I have no right
to even look upon it.

WORDS FOR PARIS

WHITE moon over the housetops,
sailing, sailing,
—how dark it must be, there in the shadow !
White moon above two towers,
—how cruel is your peace !
White moon, over the river,
sailing, sailing,
—there are three trees, black,
across the silver.
Why are the three trees sinister
against the silver water,
struck out bare and black
across the silver water,
from the quay wall,
in the shadow ?
Great church, watching,
dark above the river,
spire and towers,
dark above the moonlit river,

Words for Paris

dark in the sky of moonlight,—
what have you to do with that house,
that little house,
close against you,
low down, upon the river ?
That little house of waiting,
where they bring the dead,
who have no name ?

The three trees, bare and black,
the winter trees,
against the silver water,
why are they strange ?

White moon of trees and towers,
sailing, sailing,
so calm and high,
—you look upon the France of war,
and the thing of all most cruel
is your peace.

FRAGILE AND FORLORN

Bits of lace and painted fans,
little slippers with scarlet heels ;
diamond shoe buckles, and silver snuff boxes,
and ebony canes with gold handles.
Satins and brocades and velvets.
Fragrance of sandal wood,
and of heliotrope and rose petals.
A bit of some saint's bone, set in ivory,
with something written about it
on a slip of parchment,
the parchment yellow,
the ink quite faded out.
And the lilies of France on a stained, torn
banner.

FRANCE, OF A STRANGER

AFTER long seas
and loneliness,
there is the harbour ;
this means my France for me.

Ages of ships have gained it,
the brown and rust-red harbour,
salt-stained, and clear with wind and sun.
Ages of ships have gained it,
and there rested,
ships of weary wings,
that fold their wings,
and rest.

Into deep distances
of quietness,
lead lights and shadows
that mean my France for me.

London, One November

Lights and shadows,
and the colours soft as silence,
as far music,
wide away,
and gathering,
deepening,
to the edges ;
this means my France for me.

All the lines of hills unfolded,
all the drifted lines of mountains,
and the quiet lines of valleys
opening away to dreams ;
of the fields' clear travelling shadows,
and the forests' darkening ;
of the roofs of little houses,
and the church tower lifted up
for the twittering, wheeling swallows ;
all the soaring lines of cypress,
high above the castle turrets ;
all the lines of roads and rivers,
leading deep to dreamed-of places ;
this means my France for me.

France, of a Stranger

And old small cities,
with their lives and hours
closed away by amber walls
and sunken deep in ivy ;
where bats flit through the crumbling streets,
blurred soft with moss and lichen,
and gold-eyed lizards sleep
on rampart stones.

Little cities, dim with story,
lives and days and dreams,
down long distances of story ;
this means my France for me.

And the one city,
with her gifts uncounted,
whose every street means France for me.

Her every street means France for me ;
and all the passing of her people,
stranger people, up and down.
I watch them come and go,
the stranger people, who are my own,
and mean my France for me.

London, One November

Painted girl,
You walk where painted queens walked,
long ago.
You laughed your lover off,
as proud as gorgeous queens
who waved their knights to battle.
And you wept after,
as perhaps the queens wept,
long ago.

Old crone, hobbling,
stick and white cap,
along the river wall,
you had no flowers in your hands
for them, as they went off.
You only could wave old empty hands
valiantly after them.

Nun, with round good face,
and white-winged cornette,
where they die you may be with them,
quiet, with them, and not saddened,
for the death they die
is beautiful.

France, of a Stranger

You know it,
as the saints knew,
long ago.

Great lady,
passing with a fragrance of roses,
and soft small sound of laces,
in your life we cannot guess at,
your proud life, held away,
when they left, you laughed,
like all the other women,
and wept, as they did,
afterwards, alone.

Painted girl,
and ghosts of queens and martyrs,
kind, cheery nun,
and old crone shivering,
lace and roses, lace and roses,
and a woman, very young, and
ragged,
standing wearily,
her baby laughing to us
over her shoulder,—

London, One November

and I, a stranger,
in close touch with you,
and grateful for the touch ;
this means my France for me.

This,—and I wonder what
of lifted song ?
The song that now all France
sings out her heart in ?
The song that once rang out
against her lilies ?

Song, greater than old griefs,
and high above all blunders,
deeper than wrongs,—
this means my France for me.

Song, raised against the lilies,
long ago,
and flung out with the flag
of red and white and blue ;
this means my France for me.
Flag that they know not yet,
flag of more glorious symbol ;

France, of a Stranger

flag of the colour of dreams,
not yet quite dreamed,
but coming true ;
flag of some golden answer,
high beyond the dust of battle ;
flag of the one great light
each smallest torch has part in,—
this means my France to me.

ROADS OF FRANCE

THE roads of France call to my feet and say
to them :

“You used to dream of things we led to.

Do you know what we lead to, now ?

You followed us to find the pot of gold
at the end of the rainbow.

You followed us to find a little lighted
humble window,

candlelight, and firelight,
and something which is called home.

You followed us to find the great gold star,
that hung on the rim of the world,
that was the world's desire.

At first you stepped heavily,
because of a burden of sorrow
that there was to be carried.

You were weighted feet.

You came to us, driven out by pain to us
from houses.

Roads of France

You came to us in dawns, when our larks
were singing ;

and in noondays, and in sunsets,
and twilights, and the dark.

You loved us in rain and sunshine,
under the tremor of heat, and in the
snow.

You loved to touch us, and our touch gave
life to you.

Your love of us made little wings for you,
and you came to be winged feet.

You followed us dreaming, on little wings.

We were dream roads for you.

But you did not dream of anything
so beautiful as this thing.

Come and follow us, where we lead you.

Other feet have gone.

Other feet than you have gone, and not
come back.

They found that which we lead to,
and they do not come back.

It is the greatest thing in the world.

It is the only thing in the world.

And it is not of the world at all.

London, One November

Come," said the roads to my feet, calling
to them ;

"Come and follow us,
to the one thing that is worth reaching.
Not the pot of rainbow gold,
not the window and the firelight and
candlelight and home,
not the star of life's desire,
but a thing that is beyond life,
and that life, all life, leads to,
as we, we roads, stricken and luminous, lead
to it."

THE NEW COMERS

THERE, where the battle is, their souls go
 forth,
a cloud of witness,
a golden cloud of witness.

THERE, where the glory is, great gates are open,
and they pass in and out,
and come and go
and understand.

They go in through the gates,
and all is theirs.

They come back through the gates,
and come to us,
and see us differently and understand,
and love us perfectly,
and give the shining of their glory to us.

They go from us, and come to us, and go
 again,
and are among us.

We do not understand,
but they do, now.

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